

Nyiramana, Christine; Tuyishime, Julienne; Rank, Astrid; Scheunpflug, Annette Primary education in Rwanda

Schlesier, Juliane [Hrsg.]; Frey, Anne [Hrsg.]; Hoya, Fabian [Hrsg.]; Parade, Ralf [Hrsg.]; Rank, Astrid [Hrsg.]:
Foundations of learning. Unveiling the mosaic of primary education systems worldwide. Bad Heilbrunn : Verlag Julius Klinkhardt 2026, S. 253-269. - (Grundschule International / Primary Education International)



Quellenangabe/ Reference:

Nyiramana, Christine; Tuyishime, Julienne; Rank, Astrid; Scheunpflug, Annette: Primary education in Rwanda - In: Schlesier, Juliane [Hrsg.]; Frey, Anne [Hrsg.]; Hoya, Fabian [Hrsg.]; Parade, Ralf [Hrsg.]; Rank, Astrid [Hrsg.]: Foundations of learning. Unveiling the mosaic of primary education systems worldwide. Bad Heilbrunn : Verlag Julius Klinkhardt 2026, S. 253-269 - URN: urn:nbn:de:0111-pedocs-358014 - DOI: 10.25656/01:35801; 10.35468/6239-09

<https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:0111-pedocs-358014>

<https://doi.org/10.25656/01:35801>

in Kooperation mit / in cooperation with:



<http://www.klinkhardt.de>

Nutzungsbedingungen

Dieses Dokument steht unter folgender Creative Commons-Lizenz:
<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/deed.de> - Sie dürfen das Werk bzw. den Inhalt vervielfältigen, verbreiten und öffentlich zugänglich machen sowie Abwandlungen und Bearbeitungen des Werkes bzw. Inhaltes anfertigen, solange sie den Namen des Autors/Rechteinhabers in der von ihm festgelegten Weise nennen und die daraufhin neu entstandenen Werke bzw. Inhalte nur unter Verwendung von Lizenzbedingungen weitergeben, die mit denen dieses Lizenzvertrags identisch, vergleichbar oder kompatibel sind.
Mit der Verwendung dieses Dokuments erkennen Sie die Nutzungsbedingungen an.

Terms of use

This document is published under following Creative Commons-License:
<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/deed.en> - You may copy, distribute and transmit, adapt or exhibit the work or its contents in public and alter, transform, or change this work as long as you attribute the work in the manner specified by the author or licensor. New resulting works or contents must be distributed pursuant to this license or an identical or comparable license.

By using this particular document, you accept the above-stated conditions of use.



Kontakt / Contact:

peDOCS
DIPF | Leibniz-Institut für Bildungsforschung und Bildungsinformation
Informationszentrum (IZ) Bildung
E-Mail: pedocs@dipf.de
Internet: www.pedocs.de

Mitglied der:


Leibniz-Gemeinschaft

RWANDA

*Christine Nyiramana, Julienne Tuyishime, Astrid Rank
and Annette Scheunpflug*

Primary Education in Rwanda

Abstract

This chapter provides an overview of primary education in Rwanda, a small, landlocked country in the Great Lakes region of Sub-Saharan Africa. It traces the historical development of schooling from pre-colonial times through missionary and colonial influences, to the post-independence and post-genocide reforms. The chapter analyses the current state of the sector, describing the structure of the education system, enrolment figures, and transition rates, while also highlighting challenges such as high pupil-teacher ratios, repetition, and limited resources. Issues of language policy, curriculum reforms, teacher education, school feeding, and digitalisation are examined in detail. Furthermore, the chapter situates Rwanda's primary education within international debates on equity, inclusion, and quality, emphasising both progress and persisting obstacles. It concludes by discussing the crucial role of non-state providers, particularly churches, and the importance of partnerships in building a resilient and inclusive education system for the future.

Keywords: Education System in Rwanda, Historical Context, Quality Indicators, School Programmes

Introduction

This chapter provides an overview of primary education in Rwanda, a small, landlocked country in the Great Lakes region of Sub-Saharan Africa. Covering an area of 24,668 square kilometres and with a population of approximately 14.25 million, Rwanda has set itself an ambitious goal in its "2020 Vision and 2050 Plan": to achieve upper middle-income status for the majority of the population by 2035. A cornerstone of this vision is "universal access to quality education" (UNICEF, 2024, 1), with particular emphasis on primary educa-

tion as a critical foundation for the country's progress. The chapter begins by examining the historical context of primary education in Rwanda. It then presents a comprehensive analysis of the current state of the sector, including an overview of the educational structure, key statistics, subject offerings, types of school providers, languages of instruction, quality indicators, teacher profiles, school feeding programmes, and the digitalisation of primary schools. Finally, the chapter situates Rwanda's primary education system in the context of international education debates, and explores how global perspectives inform and interact with local initiatives.

1 The History of Primary Education in Rwanda

Prior to colonization in the late 19th century, education in the Kingdom of Rwanda was informal and provided mainly within the family. Learning also took place in *amatorero* camps – social gatherings for groups of the same age that aimed to prepare young people for active roles in society. These camps taught poetry, weaving, traditional dances, and – for boys in particular, military skills and lessons in heroism inspired by their ancestors.

German colonization began in 1897, alongside missionary activities led by the German Protestant Bethel and Basel Missions, and the Belgian Catholic White Fathers. These missionaries introduced the first formal primary education structures in Rwanda, establishing twelve missionary schools by the end of German rule in 1916.

In 1916, Rwanda was occupied by Belgium and, after the First World War, became a Belgian mandate under the League of Nations. Under Belgian rule, formal education remained largely controlled by the Catholic missions, with the government establishing only a few schools, mainly secondary schools. The main purpose of formal education was to train an elite sector in society who would be able to support the colonial administration – thus prioritizing colonial needs over community interests (Puttanna & Dusaïdi, 2017).

Rwanda gained independence in 1962 (Purdeková & Mwambari, 2022). The state then took full responsibility for formal education, which had previously been run by religious institutions. The extent of primary education was expanded, including free compulsory education to the age of eight years. There were minimal changes to the curriculum. The first three years of primary education focused on literacy in the language of instruction (which was Kinyarwanda) (McLean Hilker, 2011), and the following general education stage (from years four to eight) was taught in French. However, the government struggled to keep up with population growth. To cope with high enrolment numbers, a double-shift system was introduced, with pupils attending school either in the morning or in the afternoon. The post-independence government

allocated a higher proportion of national income to education than any other African country at the time, focusing on primary education and rural vocational training (Williams, 2016).

During the Second Republic (1973–1994), efforts to promote the Kinyarwanda language and Rwandan culture were intensified. Kinyarwanda became the main medium of instruction in primary schools, and primary education was shortened to six years. The transition rate to secondary school was very low at the time, due to limited places, entry requirements based on national examination results, and quotas (due to a military regime that adhered to discrimination based on ethnicity, regionalism, and the economic background of the child) (Puttanna & Dusaïdi, 2017). At the time of the civil war in 1990, primary school enrolment had increased from 46 % to 65 % of the total population of primary-school-aged children, reaching 1.7 million children by 1994.

The 1994 genocide against the Tutsi devastated Rwanda's education system. Approximately two-thirds of the school infrastructure was destroyed, and nearly 75 % of public sector employees (including teachers) were either killed or forced to flee (Nikuze, 2014). In the aftermath, Rwanda faced significant challenges, with little hope of restoring its previous educational standards. At that time, Rwanda was considered to be a failed state (Williams, 2017). However, the new government launched initiatives to rebuild the education system, prioritizing access for all, and improving quality (Republic of Rwanda, 2003). The educational reforms emphasized the teaching of peace, reconciliation, tolerance, justice, democracy, patriotism, solidarity and national unity – at all levels of education.

2 Primary Education in Rwanda Today

2.1 Structure and Key Statistics of the System

Over the past 30 years (since 1994), Rwanda has experienced impressive growth in the primary education sector. Entry to primary school is age-based, with 35 % of first graders having attended early childhood education, and primary education typically lasts for six years for children aged 6 to 11 (Republic of Rwanda, 2024). Transition to secondary school requires passing a national examination at the end of primary school. This transition rate increased from 71.6 % in 2017 to 82.9 % in 2021/22, showing promising progress. Rwanda is the only country in sub-Saharan Africa to have achieved the goal of enrolling all children in school by 2015, as promised by the Education for All movement (see UNESCO, 2014).

In the 2022/2023 academic year, Rwanda had 3,932 primary schools with a total enrolment of 2.84 million pupils. The average pupil-teacher ratio was 57:1,

which is well above both the international average and Rwanda's national standard of 46:1. Currently, only one-third of schools in the country meet this national target (Republic of Rwanda, 2024).

Primary school enrolment rates have increased. In 2018, a net enrolment ratio of 98.3 % was reached (Republic of Rwanda, 2024). Due to COVID-19, this ratio was decreasing to 95.8 % in the year 2022 to 95.8 %. In addition, between 2018 and 2022, the gross enrolment ratio rose from 137.5 % in 2018 to 143.5 % in 2022. Gross enrolment counts not only students who should visit a first grade due to their age, but all others being in grade one due to the fact of repetition or late enrolment. These figures show the effect of COVID-19 and the related high repetition rate, which increased from 13.4 % in 2017/18 to 30.2 % in 2021/22 (Republic of Rwanda, 2024). Many children start school later than intended or repeat grades, which results in a significant share of primary students being older than the official primary school age.

The national achievements can be attributed to ongoing initiatives, including the construction of new schools and classrooms, teacher capacity building programmes, school feeding initiatives, girls' empowerment strategies, increased parental involvement, and the elimination of double shift teaching for upper primary classes (since 2018) (MINEDUC, 2019).

Rwanda has also made significant progress in promoting girls' access to education, in the light of traditional cultures and norms. Girls are encouraged to attend school, and gender-responsive infrastructure such as 'girls' rooms have been introduced (Ali, 2014). These rooms provide sanitary pads, washrooms and rest areas for girls in need. School statistics for 2022/23 show that 2,672 primary schools had a girls' room, representing 68 % of all primary schools.

With a median age of 19.6 years in the entire population (World Bank, 2024) and a steadily growing population, the demand for primary education and school infrastructure continues to increase. Joint efforts of the government, the World Bank and the local population have resulted in large-scale school construction initiatives. The traditional practice of *Umuganda* – community work on one Saturday per month – has been, and continues to be used to engage the community in supporting school construction efforts. Since 2020, 22,505 classrooms and 31,932 latrines have been built, mainly in rural areas (Mushimiyimana & Dushimimana, 2021). In particular, community participation resulted in the construction of 11,501 classrooms and 17,252 latrines, thus significantly reducing costs (MINEDUC¹, 2022). Table 1 provides an overview of the structure of the Rwandan school system.

1 Ministry of Education (MINEDUC)

Table 1: Overview of the Rwandan School System

Age	Grade	School System		Required Teacher Qualification
15-18	S6	Secondary (A-Level after S6)	TVET (Technical and Vocational Education and Training, possible after primary)	Secondary school teacher: Bachelor's degree in education or subject + Postgraduate diploma in education
	S5			
	S4			
6-15	S3	Primary 1-6, S1-S3 (O-Level after S3)		Primary teacher: Teacher Training College (TTC), 3 years after Lower Secondary
	S2			
	S1			
	6			
	5			
	4			
	3			
	2			
	1			
3-6		Maternelle (Pre-primary)		Pre-primary teacher: Teacher Training College (TTC) or Early Childhood Education certificate

2.2 Language of Instruction

Rwanda is one of the few countries in Africa with a single mother tongue, Kinyarwanda (Habyarimana, 2015). However, due to its colonial history and membership of the East African Community, Rwanda's constitution lists Kinyarwanda, English and French as official languages (Republic of Rwanda, 2023). The language of instruction in education has long been a matter of debate and policy shifts.

From the 1930s to 1978, Kinyarwanda was the language of instruction in primary schools for grades 1 to 3, with French taking over from grade 4. In 1978, primary education was completely localised and Kinyarwanda became the sole language of instruction throughout primary school (Sibomana, 2022). After the 1994 genocide, Kinyarwanda remained the language of instruction at the lower primary level, while at the upper primary level there were two parallel systems: most schools used French, but some began to use English. National examinations were offered in both those languages.

Policies continued to shift, with English being introduced as the sole language of instruction for all primary grades in 2008 (UNICEF, 2016). However, this

policy was changed again in 2011, when Kinyarwanda was reintroduced as the medium of instruction for lower primary, while English remained the medium of instruction for upper primary levels. In 2019, another shift occurred, with English again becoming the medium of instruction for both lower and upper primary levels.

These frequent shifts, with teachers not being proficient in English as the medium of instruction, led to problems with the quality of teaching (Williams, 2021; Mugirase, 2020). Even though teacher training programmes now use English as the language of instruction, English language deficiencies among teachers remain a significant barrier (UNICEF, 2024).

2.3 Curriculum

The subjects taught at primary level are Kinyarwanda, English, French, Mathematics, Social and Religious Studies (SST), Science and Elementary Technology (SET), Creative Arts and Physical Education (see Table 2). In the early grades, each class has a single teacher who is responsible for all subjects. In later grades, however, students have specialised subject teachers, with one teacher being assigned to each class to oversee tasks such as completing end-of-term reports and recording daily attendance.

Table 2: Primary School Subjects and Hours Taught

Subject	Number of periods per week (a period lasts 50 minutes)	
	Lower primary ¹ (class 1 to 3)	Upper primary ² (class 4 to 6)
Kinyarwanda	8	8
English	8	8
French	3	4
Mathematics	8	8
Social and religious studies (SST)	4	6
Science and elementary technology (SET)	4	6
Creative arts (music, fine art and crafts)	2	2
Physical education	2	2
Total	39 (+5 to 8)	44 (+3)

Note. ¹ For Mathematics, English, Kinyarwanda, SET, and SST, there is 1 additional hour of remedial teaching. For mathematics, there is 1 additional hour of numeracy, and for Kinyarwanda and English there is 1 additional hour of reading. ² For Mathematics, English and Kinyarwanda, there is 1 hour additional of remedial teaching.

In 2018, the Ministry of Education began phasing out the double-shift system in upper primary education to ensure that students receive the required teaching hours (Republic of Rwanda, 2024; MINEDUC, 2021). This change allowed for the effective implementation of the unified timetable.

Following international curriculum trends, Rwanda introduced a competency-based curriculum in 2015. This curriculum emphasises active student participation and promotes inclusive education (Habyarimana et al., 2022). However, studies show that teachers face several challenges in implementing this approach, including increased workload, lack of appropriate teaching materials, and insufficient preparatory training (Nsengimana et al., 2021).

2.4 School Providers

Given Rwanda's historical and economic context, public education is provided not only by the state, but also by non-state actors. Most non-state providers, including churches, offer tuition-free education as a public good, while a smaller number of private companies and NGOs offer private schooling options (Niyibizi et al., 2021). That means, that there are three group of schools: government-schools, non-state government supported schools and non-state only private funded schools. In government-supported schools, teachers' salaries are paid by the government, but school providers as churches, cover other costs such as teacher training, maintenance, buildings, and grounds. Of the primary schools run by religious organisations, there are 1,202 Catholic, 701 Protestant, 71 Adventist and 18 Islamic schools, representing over 50 % of all primary schools (Republic of Rwanda, 2024). Without the significant contributions of these groups, it would be difficult for the Rwandan state to meet the demand for primary education alone (Wenz, 2019; Scheunpflug et al., 2021a; 2021b). In addition, the religious groups offer a degree of freedom for new pedagogical developments, such as learner-centred teaching methods, or addressing the historical impact of the genocide – topics which are often more difficult to implement in state schools (Krogull et al., 2014; Krogull & Scheunpflug, 2016; Scheunpflug et al., 2019).

2.5 Educational Quality

Since 2003, it has been prohibited to charge tuition fees for primary school education. On the one hand, this has boosted enrolment rates; however, on the other hand, it has created serious problems for non-state providers. Teachers' salaries in schools of non-state providers are mainly paid by the government, but other costs such as teacher training, infrastructure and resources fall on non-state providers; this has widened the gap between available funding and the actual cost of education, which in turn, has contributed to a decline in

educational quality. Improving the quality of primary education remains a major challenge in Rwanda, as schools often struggle with inadequate resources, poorly trained teachers, a lack of continuous professional development, poor management, and high teacher workloads. Low levels of numeracy and literacy remain a major challenge, with many students leaving primary school after Grade 6 without sufficient skills to succeed in secondary education or the workforce (Nizeyimana et al., 2020). Repetition rates in primary education are high, with more than a third of students repeating at least one grade level.

The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated these problems and led to an 11-month closure of schools (Timm et al., 2024; Markus, 2023). When the schools reopened in 2022, all students were required to start their class again; this implies that from 2022 onwards – considering the incoming new children in Grade 1, there will be a grade level with double the number of expected students, and this will continue for the next 12 years (Aragie et al., 2021). While the schools were closed during the pandemic, the state sought to continue education through other media, e.g., radio, television and WhatsApp. However, this widened socio-economic and regional divides, as rural areas generally have less access to electricity, television and the internet.

Rwanda was also affected by the massive outflow of female children from school during the COVID-19 pandemic (MINEDUC, 2021). Girls were the most vulnerable at that time, due to violence, unplanned pregnancies and early marriages, resulting in many girls dropping out of primary and secondary school. In addition, many students dropped out of school due to the economic crisis caused by parents losing their jobs. Furthermore, teachers – particularly in non-state schools, left their posts, as school providers were unable to pay salaries as the funding of government schools is given on the basis of lessons taught (Ukobizaba & Nizeyimana, 2021).

2.6 Teacher training and remuneration

Teacher Training Colleges (TTCs) were established in Rwanda in 1999 to provide initial and in-service training for pre-primary and primary school teachers (Nzabalirwa, 2014). TTCs are schools at the secondary level and the teacher training qualification lasts for three years. That means that with the qualification as a primary teacher, students receive their secondary-school-diploma. Students are admitted to TTCs after passing national examinations at the end of lower secondary school. There are 16 TTCs in Rwanda, one in each of the 16 districts (Karangwa, 2017), ten of which are run by Catholic and Protestant churches. Although TTCs charge tuition fees, these are lower than those charged by other secondary schools. After completing their studies at a TTC, graduates receive a secondary school certificate that qualifies them to become pre-primary or primary school teachers.

The salary for primary teachers is close to the daily minimum wage defined by the World Bank, which is €1.99€ per day, or about €59.70 per month (World Bank, 2024; see Table 3).

Table 3: Salaries of Teachers in Primary Education, Per Month (Exchange Rate as at 1st October 2024)

Level of experience	Rwandan Francs	Equivalent in Euro
Beginner	108.488 Rwf	€73.40
Experienced first level	115.294 Rwf	€78.08
Experienced second level	121.229 Rwf	€82.10
Experienced third level	127.669 Rwf	€86.47
Advanced experience	239.513 Rwf	€162.20

Due to low salaries, Rwanda’s education system faces a significant shortage of teachers (Takavarasha & Uwamariya, 2024). To address this problem, the government introduced strategies to attract top students to Teacher Training Colleges (TTCs) after lower secondary school. These strategies include reducing tuition fees and providing scholarships for university studies after three years’ experience in primary school teaching.

2.7 School Feeding

Given the prevalence of poverty in the country, school feeding plays a critical role in supporting pupils’ health and basic nutrition. Launched in 2019, this initiative provides basic meals to all children and motivates parents to send their children to school (Mensah & Nsabimana, 2020). The government contributes 56 Rwf (about €0.04) per pupil per day, while parents contribute 94 Rwf (€0.06) per day. This amounts to a monthly parental contribution of 1.974 Rwf (€1.33€), 5.922 Rwf (€3.98€) per quarter and 17.860 Rwf (€12) per year. The aim of the feeding programme is to provide students with at least one meal per day to improve their academic performance, and to combat malnutrition, particularly in rural areas. In addition, the government initiated the “One Cup of Milk per Child” programme to provide essential protein to children in primary schools (MINEDUC, 2022).

2.8 Digitalisation and Information and Communication Technology

The Government of Rwanda has embraced the use of ICT (Information and Communication Technology) by integrating such technologies into education. The goal is to encourage the population to become familiar with the use of ICT, in order to prepare for a digital future.

The “One Laptop per Child” initiative, launched in primary schools in 2008, aimed to provide every child with a personal computer (laptop). In the first phase of the project, each district benefited from at least five schools equipped with laptops for every child. The second phase, launched in 2011, provided one school in each administrative sector in the country with at least one One-Laptop-per-Child school, reaching 269,116 laptops in 933 schools funded by the state (Kasozzi-Mulindwa & Niyongabo, 2018). In 2019, the third phase began, with the training of 9,350 teachers from 850 schools in the use of ICT in grades four and six.

However, the initiative faced several challenges, especially in rural areas where schools often lacked electricity and infrastructure (Munyengabe et al., 2017). Teachers reported inadequate training that hindered the effective use of ICT in the classroom, and many expressed a need for personal laptops and further training to develop both technical and pedagogical digital skills (Munyengabe et al., 2017; Adam et al., 2016). By the 2022/23 school year, 41.3 % of all primary schools in Rwanda are using ICT in the classroom, and 19.5 % have been designated as ‘smart classrooms’ (Republic of Rwanda, 2024).

2.9 Response to COVID-19 and Digital Infrastructure Initiatives

During the COVID-19 school closures, Rwanda implemented several online education programmes. However, access to these resources was uneven due to limited digital infrastructure, particularly in rural areas and among low-income families. In response, the government launched new initiatives for sustainable solutions. Church providers took responsibility such as the pilot project “Resilience of Educational Institutions through Digitalisation – A Reaction to COVID-19 (ReDiCo)” in the Great Lakes region. This project, funded by the German Development Cooperation through “Brot für die Welt”, aims to improve the quality of digital education at all levels, from kindergarten to university, by providing digital equipment and comprehensive teacher training.

3 Striving for Quality Education in Partnership with Different Partners and Stakeholders in a Globalised World

The situation in Rwanda’s primary schools highlights several issues that are common to many impoverished countries:

- *School expansion in the face of population growth:* Despite major social efforts to build schools and train teachers, it is a challenge to expand the school system faster than population growth demands. Due to the youth of the school-going population, the number of students to be enrolled will continue to grow in the coming years, thus making the continuous expansion of primary education a necessity.

- *Overcoming the COVID-19 crisis:* The education crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic will have a lasting impact on Rwanda's education system for the next decade. Prolonged school closures resulted in a 'double cohort' of students, requiring additional financial resources to cope with the surge in enrolment and to address educational gaps.
- *Slow progress in early childhood education:* Although the need for early childhood education is recognised in the field of education policy, actual expansion lags behind in terms of available spaces and professional training. In addition, raising the necessary funds for early childhood education is a challenge for a population that is on average very poor, as that level of education is not free, and not adequately supported by the state. This also means that educational deficits are pushed into primary school, where remediation is all the more time-consuming and costly.
- *Equity and justice in education:* Although Rwanda has made progress in achieving educational equity for girls in primary school, significant challenges remain. The COVID-19 crisis highlighted the fact that girls remain a vulnerable group who benefit from the safety of schools, particularly in the context of domestic violence. In addition, disparities in educational opportunities between rural and urban areas continue to widen, and are exacerbated by the increasing digitalisation of classrooms. The transition to secondary school is regulated by exam results and grades, and together with parental financial resources, this determines whether a student can enrol in a particular secondary school of desirable quality. This transition process further exacerbates inequalities. The quality of education hardly compensates for educational opportunities of poor parents, so educational inequality tends to increase in this respect as well. In addition, the national language policy is an obstacle, as both national languages – French and English – are accessible only to a limited portion of the population.
- *Quality of education and skills acquisition:* Experience shows that the acquisition of skills in Rwanda's primary schools is lagging behind, even though the country has not yet participated in international competency tests such as the OECD's PISA for Development. Overall, the quality of education remains low, with too much time spent on educational goals, relative to results achieved. This mismatch leads to unmet expectations and contributes to lower self-esteem among students, which hinders their ability to develop independent learning skills. As a result, a cycle of low productivity and educational deficits becomes entrenched and difficult to reverse.
- *Teacher recruitment and retention:* Attracting young people into the teaching profession is a global challenge, and one that is particularly acute in Rwanda. In countries like Rwanda, where teacher training is subject to the

payment of fees and the expected salary is just above the subsistence level – barely enough to support a family, it is even more difficult to recruit and train teachers. The open mentioned mechanism to reduce tuitions for top students is far not enough to bridge the gap between the needed teachers and the teachers starting teacher education. As a result, the lack of systematic teacher training and unclear funding mechanisms for professional development hinder long-term improvements in the quality of education. As long as teaching remains poorly paid, it is unlikely that sufficient numbers of young people will choose to enter the profession. In addition, opportunities for better paid positions in non-governmental organisations further complicate efforts to retain people in the education system.

- *Digitisation*: Rwanda's efforts to digitise primary schools have been enormous, as evidenced by the number of classrooms that are now equipped with laptop computers. However, without access to the Internet and intensive training for teachers, equipping schools with digital devices will not contribute to the acquisition of skills and improvements in the quality of education. To teach effectively in the digital age, teachers need to have excellent digital skills. These skills do not necessarily have to be acquired digitally; they can also be developed initially in an analogue context, through the concept of computational thinking. Given the extensive interconnection between analogue and digital realities, a purely technical perspective is insufficient. Teachers need competences that include both a knowledge component (including informatics, pedagogical-psychological, subject-specific and didactic media-related knowledge, as outlined in the TPACK model, Valtonen et al., 2015), as well as an action component (Terhart, 2011).
- *The role of different stakeholders*: An education system depends on various social groups taking responsibility for planning, implementation and support of the system. Even if the state pays teachers' salaries, non-state providers need to bear substantial costs for land, construction, maintenance, and ongoing teacher training. In Rwanda, as in many other countries in sub-Saharan Africa (e.g. the Democratic Republic of Congo, South Sudan, or Uganda), these other stakeholders are Christian churches (see Scheunpflug et al., 2021a, 2021b). Investments by the churches represent a major contribution to schooling and educational equity in Rwanda, as the churches tend to be present where the state has limited presence, i.e. mostly in rural areas, and covers more than 50 % of schools. This role of churches as non-state school authorities deserves to receive increased attention in the international debate on school actors and educational equity (Wenz 2019; Scheunpflug et al., 2019).

- *Language of instruction:* Teaching in a language other than the mother tongue of teachers and pupils limits educational opportunities. In Rwanda, millions of children speak a different language at home from the one they use at school, which creates high learning barriers for them. This is particularly evident in the context of literacy acquisition. In order to identify words quickly, children need an internal lexicon that they usually have in their first language (Coltheart et al., 2001). If neither teachers nor children communicate in a language that they are comfortable with, teaching becomes little more than misunderstood rote memorisation, and cognitive engagement does not occur. Since there is a common language in Rwanda (Kinyarwanda), initial teaching could easily be done in this mother tongue.
- *Teaching methods:* The lack of basic skills among children after primary school is certainly partly due to the language of instruction, but it also reflects the teaching methods used. Very often, teaching times and content are not adapted to the students' life situations, and teaching methods and materials are outdated. Group work, independent learning, critical and problem-solving thinking, familiarity with new (digital) technologies, and the teaching of life skills are not sufficiently encouraged. This is exacerbated by the double-shift system in very large classes (around 60 students) that are taught in small, poorly equipped rooms.
- *Inclusion:* In Rwanda, some particularly vulnerable groups, including children with disabilities, are often denied access to school and kindergarten. Since 2019, there has been a comprehensive syllabus on special needs education, and inclusive education for teacher training colleges (TTCs). This syllabus explicitly states the goal that the Government of Rwanda is committed to achieving education for all – without excluding people with special educational needs and other vulnerable groups, through inclusive education policies and strategies (Rwanda Education Board, 2019).

4 Conclusion

Rwanda's education system faces significant challenges, particularly in terms of quality and access, all of which have been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. The reliance on non-state providers – particularly churches, is critical in meeting educational demand, but financial and infrastructural constraints continue to hamper progress. Addressing these issues requires a multi-faceted approach, including improvements in funding, teacher training and infrastructure development.

While the educational challenges are real, Rwanda is a country of hope. Its population is young and eager to learn. Many young people, especially women play a key role in education, and many stakeholders and institutions such

as churches, take responsibility for expanding and improving the education system. These positive aspects are encouraging in terms of further development prospects.

References

- Adam, T., Haßler, B., & Cruickshank, H. (2016). One Laptop per Child Rwanda: Enabling factors and barriers. In *Empowering the 21st century learner* (pp. 184–195). Retrieved from <http://aa-rf.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/SAICET-2016-Proceedings.pdf>
- Ali, M. (2014). *Gender equality in Rwanda*. Aga Khan Foundation – The Afghanistan Human and Institutional Development Program. Retrieved from https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Muhammad-Nader/publication/304352388_Report_on_Gender_Equality_in_Rwanda/links/576ce07c08aec1ce8e1e6a1c/Report-on-Gender-Equality-in-Rwanda.pdf
- Archie, E., Diao, X., Robinson, S., Rosenbach, G., Spielman, D. J., & Thurlow, J. (2020). *Assessing the economywide impacts of COVID-19 on Rwanda's economy, agri-food system, and poverty*. International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI).
- Coltheart, M., Rastle, K., Perry, C., Langdon, R., & Ziegler, J. (2001). DRC: A dual route cascaded model of visual word recognition and reading aloud. *Psychological Review*, 108(1), 204–256. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-295X.108.1.204>
- Habyarimana, H. (2015). Investigation of attitudes and classroom practices of educators and learners in relation to English as the medium of instruction at four primary schools in Rwanda (Doctoral dissertation, University of the Witwatersrand, Faculty of Humanities, School of Education).
- Habyarimana, J. D., Hashakimana, T., Ntawihira, P., & Ke, Z. (2022). Quality education in Rwanda: A critical analysis of quality indicators. *IOSR Journal of Humanities and Social Science*, 27(2), 52–70. <https://doi.org/10.9790/0837-2702065270>
- Karangwa, E. (2017). Republic of Rwanda. In M. C. A. (Ed.), *The Praeger international handbook of special education* (Vol. 3, p. 240). Praeger.
- Kasozzi-Mulindwa, S., & Niyongabo, R. (2018). Transforming delivery and quality of primary school education through technology: One Laptop per Child project in Rwanda. In *ICERI2018 Proceedings* (pp. 8349–8357). <https://doi.org/10.21125/iceri.2018.0517>
- Krogull, S., & Scheunpflug, A. (2016). Empirische Perspektiven friedenspädagogischen Handelns in Post-War-Societies [Empirical perspectives on peace education practices in post-war societies]. *Zeitschrift für Internationale Bildungsforschung und Entwicklungspädagogik*, (4), 21–26.
- Krogull, S., Scheunpflug, A., & Rwambonera, F. (2014). *Teaching Social Competencies in Post-Conflict Societies*. Waxmann.
- Markus, L. W. (2023). *Bildungsmanagement und Covid-19 in Ruanda: Eine systemtheoretische Analyse der Reaktionen auf die Covid-19-Pandemie* [Educational management and COVID-19 in Rwanda: A systems-theoretical analysis of responses to the COVID-19 pandemic] (Master's thesis, Universität Bamberg).
- McLean Hilker, L. (2011). The role of education in driving conflict and building peace: The case of Rwanda. *PROSPECTS*, 41(2), 267–282. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11125-011-9193-7>
- Mensah, J. T., & Nsabimana, A. (2020). *Food for thought: School feeding and cognitive performance in Rwanda* (Working paper). Retrieved from <https://www.academia.edu/download/80763908/schoolfeedingandstudentperformanceinrwandabyaimablejustice.pdf>
- Ministry of Education [MINEDUC]. (2019). *2018 education statistics*. MINEDUC.
- Ministry of Education [MINEDUC]. (2021). Backward looking joint review of the education sector (2020/21). MINEDUC.
- Ministry of Education [MINEDUC]. (2022). Rwandan school feeding operational guidelines summary. MINEDUC.

- Mugirase, G. (2020). Language of instruction and quality of education in Rwanda: A case study of secondary school third form learners in the Gisagara District (Master's thesis, University of the Western Cape). Retrieved from https://www.connecting-africa.net/query_2.php?rid=B00078035
- Munyengabe, S., Yiyi, Z., Haiyan, H., & Hitimana, S. (2017). Primary teachers' perceptions on ICT integration for enhancing teaching and learning through the implementation of one laptop per child program in primary schools of Rwanda. *Eurasia Journal of Mathematics, Science and Technology Education*, 13(11), 7193–7204. <https://doi.org/10.12973/ejmste/79044>
- Mushimiyimana, J. D., & Dushimimana, J. D. (2021). The relationship between smart classroom and learners' academic performance in public boarding schools of Gicumbi District, Rwanda. *Inkanyiso: Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*, 13(2), 228–241. <https://doi.org/10.4102/ink.v13i2.5>
- Nikuze, D. (2014). The Genocide against the Tutsi in Rwanda: Origins, causes, implementation, consequences, and the post-genocide era. *International Journal of Development and Sustainability*, 3(5), 1086–1098.
- Niyibizi, E., Gahutu, C., & Nyiramana, C. (2021). Educational governance in Rwanda. Coordinating action for equity through cooperation between education providers. *ZEP: Zeitschrift für internationale Bildungsforschung und Entwicklungspädagogik*, 44(4), 14–18. <https://doi.org/10.31244/zep.2021.04.03>
- Nizeyimana, G., Nzabirwa, W., Mukungambeho, D., & Nkiliye, I. (2020). Hindrances to quality of basic education in Rwanda. *Rwandan Journal of Education*, 5(1), 53–67. Retrieved from <https://www.ajol.info/index.php/rje/article/view/202575>
- Nsengimana, T., Bazimaziki, G., Nyirahabimana, A., Mushimiyimana, J. B., Mutarutinya, V., Mugabo, L. R., & Nsengimana, V. (2021). Online learning during COVID-19 pandemic in Rwanda: Experience of postgraduate students on language of instruction, mathematics and science education. *Contemporary Mathematics and Science Education*, 2(1), Article ep21009. <https://doi.org/10.30935/conmaths/10788>
- Nzabirwa, W. (2014). Rwanda: An overview. In E. Shizha & A. Abdi (Eds.), *Education in East and Central Africa* (pp. 299–319). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.5040/9781472593504.ch-012>
- Purdeková, A., & Mwambari, D. (2022). Post-genocide identity politics and colonial durabilities in Rwanda. *Critical African Studies*, 14(1), 19–37. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21681392.2021.1938404>
- Puttanna, K., & Dusaide, G. O. (2017). The evolution of general education system in Rwanda - An analysis. *EPRA International Journal of Economic and Business Review*, 5(9), 170– 180. <file:///Users/admin/Downloads/EW201709-01-002079.pdf>
- Republic of Rwanda. (2003). *Education sector policy*. Ministry of Education. Retrieved from https://clr.africanchildforum.org/policy%20per%20country/rwanda/rwanda_education_2003_en.pdf
- Republic of Rwanda. (2023). *Constitution of the Republic of Rwanda. Official Gazette*, No. Special of 04/08/2023, Year 62.
- Republic of Rwanda. (2024). *2022/23 education statistical yearbook*. Ministry of Education.
- Rwanda Education Board. (2019). *Special needs and inclusive education*. Retrieved from https://elearning.reb.rw/pluginfile.php/15496/mod_resource/content/1/Special%20Needs%20_%20IE.pdf?forcedownload=1
- Scheunpflug, A., Rwambonera, F., & Mutabazi, S. (2019). Schulische Friedensarbeit in Ruanda: Eine Partnerschaft mit dem Ökumenischen Kirchenrat in Ruanda [Peace education in Rwandan schools: A partnership with the Ecumenical Council of Churches in Rwanda]. In Kirchenamt der EKD (Ed.), *Auf dem Weg zu einer Kirche der Gerechtigkeit und des Friedens. Ein friedens-theologisches Lesebuch* (pp. 369–375). Evangelische Verlagsanstalt.
- Scheunpflug, A., Wenz, M., Brown Rubindamayugi, M., Lutswamba, J. K., Njobati, F., Nyiramana, C., Mutabazi, S., Njoya, C. E., Kavira Kamundu, S., Raharijaona, O., & Wodon, Q. (2021a). Relationships between Christian schools and the state: A brief comparative analysis for five sub-Saharan African countries. *International Studies in Catholic Education*, 13(2), 163–174. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19422539.2021.2010456>

- Scheunpflug, A., Wenz, M., Brown Rubindamayugi, M., Lutswamba, J. K., Njobati, F., Nyiramana, C., Mutabazi, S., Njoya, C. E., Kavira Kamundu, S., & Raharijaona, O. (2021b). *Faith-based non-state actors in selected African countries: A comparative analysis of Catholic and Protestant schooling in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Rwanda, Tanzania, Madagascar and Cameroon* (Document code: ED/GEMR/MRT/2021/P1/23). UNESCO. <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000380085>
- Sibomana, E. (2022). Transitioning from a local language to English as a medium of instruction: Rwandan teachers' and classroom-based perspectives. *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism*, 25(4), 1259–1274. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13670050.2020.1749554>
- Takavarasha, E., & Uwamariya, M. (2024). Towards strengthening the mentoring of Teacher Training College (TTC) tutors through the co-teaching approach in the Eastern Province, Rwanda. *Rwandan Journal of Education*, 7(2), 4–16.
- Terhart, E. (2011). Lehrerberuf und Professionalität: Gewandeltes Begriffsverständnis – neue Herausforderungen [The teaching profession and professionalism: Changing conceptions – new challenges]. In W. Helsper & R. Tippelt (Eds.), *Pädagogische Professionalität* (pp. 202–224). Beltz. <https://doi.org/10.25656/01:7095>
- Timm, S., Ress, S., Hassun, H., Kasereka, J., Kavira Kamundu, S., Markus, L., Njobati, F., Ohlig, L., & Seibert, J. (2024). Coping with protracted crises in education systems and the role of school providers: Empirical findings from studies in Rwanda, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and the Kurdistan Region. In Deutsche Gesellschaft für Erziehungswissenschaft (Ed.), *Krisen und Transformationen* (pp. 343–354). Budrich.
- Ukobizaba, F., & Nizeyimana, G. (2021). Facing the effects of COVID-19 on Grade-12 students' education: A focus on science and mathematics instructions. *African Journal of Educational Studies in Mathematics and Sciences*, 17(1), 101–111. <https://doi.org/10.4314/ajesms.v17i1.7>
- UNESCO (2014). *Education for All Global Monitoring Report*. Paris.
- UNICEF. (2017). *Rwanda: The impact of language policy and practice on children's learning – Evidence from Eastern and Southern Africa*. Retrieved from <https://www.unicef.org/esa/sites/unicef.org/esa/files/2018-09/UNICEF-2017-Language-and-Learning-Rwanda.pdf>
- UNICEF (2024). *Education in Rwanda: A Situation analysis*. Retrieved from <https://www.unicef.org/rwanda/media/5346/file/UNICEF%20Rwanda.pdf>
- Valtonen, T., Sointu, E. T., Mäkitalo-Siegl, K., & Kukkonen, J. (2015). Developing a TPACK measurement instrument for 21st century pre-service teachers. *Seminar.net: International Journal of Media, Technology & Life-Long Learning*, 11(2), 87–100. <https://doi.org/10.7577/seminar.2353>
- Wenz, M. (2019). *Die Funktion von nichtstaatlichen Primarschulen in Post-Konflikt-Gesellschaften: Eine Fallstudie zum Bildungswesen in Ruanda* [The function of non-state primary schools in post-conflict societies: A case study of the education system in Rwanda]. Springer. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-658-28918-8>
- Williams, T. (2016). *Oriented towards action: The political economy of primary education in Rwanda* (Effective States and Inclusive Development [ESID] Working Paper No. 64). University of Manchester. Retrieved from https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=2835537
- Williams, T. P. (2017). The political economy of primary education: Lessons from Rwanda. *World Development*, 96, 550–561.
- Williams, T. P. (2021). *Why did Rwanda abruptly change the language in schools - Again?* Retrieved from <https://www.worldpoliticsreview.com/in-rwanda-language-change-in-schools-leaves-students-and-teachers-struggling/?one-time-read-code=52976172770466143074>
- World Bank. (2024). *Rwanda – Data*. Retrieved from <https://data.worldbank.org/country/rwanda>

Author Information

Nyiramana, Christine, Dr.

Protestant University of Rwanda

Faculty of Education

Areas of Expertise: Educational quality, Teacher Education, Feedback, Global Learning

Address: Protestant University of Rwanda

P.o Box 619 Butare, Huye District, Rwanda

E-Mail: nyirachris55@gmail.com

Tuyishime, Julienne, M.A.

Managing Director of QUEDIR (Quality Education Development Initiative in Rwanda)

Areas of Expertise: Education Consultancy, Primary and Secondary teacher trainer, Child Care, and adult literacy.

Address: Eastern province, Rwamagana District, Rwanda

P. O Box 101 Rwamagana

E-Mail: julituyishime1@gmail.com

Rank, Astrid, Prof. Dr.

University of Regensburg

Chair of General Primary Education and Didactics of Primary School

Areas of Expertise: Professional Development, Heterogeneity and Inclusion, Language Education in Subject-Specific Contexts

Address: Universität Regensburg

Universitätsstraße 31, 93053 Regensburg, Germany

E-Mail: astrid.rank@ur.de

ORCID: 0000-0002-2468-6129

Scheunpflug, Annette, Prof. Dr., Dr. h.c., Dr. h.c.

University of Bamberg

Chair of Foundation of Education

Areas of Expertise: Educational Quality, Global Citizenship Education, Anthropology in Education, Religion and Education

Address: Universität Bamberg

Markusplatz 3, 96047 Bamberg, Germany

E-Mail: annette.scheunpflug@uni-bamberg.de

ORCID: 0000-0002-8813-6150